The Historical Novel: Jack Lindsay's *1649: A Novel of a Year*

In *Fanfrolico and After* Jack Lindsay discusses the historical novels he began to write in the mid 1930s. 'I still, however, could not handle the contemporary scene.'[1] When contemporary society proves too resistant, then a recourse to history can be a way of approaching it from another direction, an approach to catch it offguard, unprotected. So it was in the mid-seventeenth century, both before the English Revolution and in the Restoration aftermath of repression, that poets turned to Old Testament themes: to search for a model that would illuminate the current complexities; and to evade the complex of repressions that effectively discouraged an accurate expression of the present moment. To turn to the historical is not to flee in escapism from the present, but to confront it by a negation that will allow a true perception of the negated present to emerge dialectically. The inexpressible crisis of the nineteen-thirties thus finds itself revealed in Lindsay's *1649: A Novel of A Year* (1938);[2] the emergent centralized, military-based, repressive Junto of Cromwell images the emergent dictatorships and national governments and the destruction of the radical impulses of cooperation and freedom at this moment in twentieth-century history.

The stress in *1649* on a world of surveillance and control, then, has its origins not only in an accurate portrayal of the historical period, but also expresses the mood of twentieth-century reality. 'There's more eyes on us than we think' (5); 'there were so many spies about' (7); 'there's a lot of treachery about' (58); 'the notes of a spy' (84); 'a spy of some kind' (85); throughout the novel spying and surveillance provide a

1 Jack Lindsay, *Fanfrolico and After*, London, 1962, p.272.
2 Jack Lindsay, *1649: A Novel of a Year*, London, 1938. All quotations are from this edition.

leitmotiv. The stress locates *1649* as contemporary with the modern vision of a Conrad or a Hasek or a Kafka—and expresses, too, the conscious awareness of 1930s activists: throughout Edward Upward's *In the Thirties*,[3] for instance, there is the same fear that this or that character might be a police spy, that to act in such a way might be to respond to the pressures of the agent-provocateur. In *1649* this emphasis, relocated in the twentieth century, is the explanation of the pressure against writing a novel of twentieth-century society; this stress on surveillance and control, on the raids on publishers (378), on book burning (515) is the expression of a twentieth-century reality, inexpressible because it would appear too 'paranoid', too 'dramatic', too 'romantic', too 'unreal'; but situated in a past where such things might have been possible, it reilluminates a present where such possibilities are inexpressible. The examples of Conrad (in *Under Western Eyes*) and Hasek and Kafka are examples from non-English born writers; the sort of thing that can only happen 'on the continent'. When these things are located in Britain in Upward's *In the Thirties*, they are mediated through the callow protagonist and carry that protagonist's adolescently febrile note.

So just as the fable or utopian future projection allows current social tendencies to be explored, so does the historical novel; both by partial analogy, and by a pursuit of the origins of contemporary social forces. This is not the conservative use of history, that says that things were always the same, such that we find in Arthur Koestler's analogies from the Roman republic or the French revolution in *Darkness at Noon*.[4] It is a history that seeks analogies, points of insight; but that also sees that things were never exactly the same; that turns to history for an understanding of origins, of how capitalism established itself over the cooperative impulses, how the cooperative impulses were outmanoeuvred by Junto authoritarian centralism. It is not a static history; it stresses dynamic, movement, change; and the perspective is a dialectical one; one that can see simultaneously both identities and differences: as Lindsay writes in *Fanfrolico and After*, 'The effect should

3 Edward Upward, *In the Thirties*, London, 1962.

4 Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, translated by Daphne Hardy (1940), Harmondsworth, 1972. See Michael Wilding, *Political Fictions*, London, 1980, p.195.

be simultaneously: How like ourselves, how unlike.'[5]

And it is a committed, radical history.[6] As the political thinkers of the English revolution turned back to Anglo-Saxon society before the Norman invasion to find a model for freedoms that were or might have been and yet now were lost, so Lindsay turns to the English revolution with similar motives. 'I wanted now to turn to English history, to use the novel to revive revolutionary traditions,' he writes in *Fanfrolico*.[7] And it is a revival by demystification. Discussing Lukács' account of Scott in *Decay and Renewal* Lindsay writes: 'Scott breaks through the falsified image of England as the model land of peaceful development, which idealized 1688 (with its bargain struck among the magnates) and forgot 1649 (the climax of the bloody struggle which made the compromise-bargain possible.'[8] And it is this 'climax of the bloody struggle' that is Lindsay's theme in *1649*; a theme meaningful to the continuing struggle of the time of its publication (1938) and of our time now. It is a historical novel that offers a focus for our current crisis. As Lukács wrote in *The Historical Novel,*

> Without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible. But this relationship, in the case of really great historical art, does not consist in alluding to contemporary events, a practice which Pushkin cruelly ridiculed in the work of Scott's incompetent imitators, but in bringing the past to life as the pre-history of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it.[9]

5 Lindsay, *Fanfrolico*, p.271.

6 In *1649: A Novel of a Year ... Lost Birthright ...* and *Men of Forty-Eight*, Lindsay set out to vivify the historical traditions behind English Socialism and to show that it did indeed stand for the completion of national destiny. It is a limited aim: but in the first novel, *1649*, he transcends the limitation and gives to Marxist ideology a life and conviction few British novelists had so far been able to do. His characters are dominated by economic motives and class attitudes; but to a great extent he has made this convincing and truthful in the context of the world he has created.' David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, London, 1978, pp.106–7.

7 Lindsay, *Fanfrolico*, p.269.

8 Jack Lindsay, *Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on Twentieth Century Writing*, Sydney, 1976, p.33.

9 George Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, London, 1962, p.53.

There are none of those allusions to contemporary twentieth-century events in *1649*; but there are the verbal indicators of the recurrent use of 'masses' in the opening section that orient the reader to a contemporary, and specifically marxist, context: 'The dull tension of the masses' (1); 'the stubbornly enduring masses' (8); 'the watching masses' (17). The context is the execution of King Charles, and the surrounding crowd. A twentieth-century conservative novelist might have referred to the 'mob'; a conservative seventeenth-century contemporary might have referred to the 'multitude' or the 'vulgar'. 'Masses' here is the insignia of the twentieth-century novelist's point of view; it only infrequently occurs again in the novel; but it serves in this opening section to establish a view of history; and to establish in this particular episode a radical polarity between the masses and the king.

And beginning with the execution of Charles likewise establishes the novel's orientation. This is not the tragic finale of the life of the royal martyr; it functions, rather, as a prologue; or in movie terms as the pre-credit sequence. It tells what has passed. Charles is already irrelevant to the political issues. Our conventional expectations of a historical novel about the Civil War and Revolution are of the opposition between King and parliament; cavaliers and roundheads. Lindsay does not ignore these expectations: but places them. The famous event, the execution, is brought in; but by its placing its significance is absolutely de-emphasized. Charles is allowed to play his expected part; but as with Andrew Marvell's 'An Horatian Ode' it is a 'part' with all the theatrical connotations: 'Royal Actor,' 'Tragick Scaffold,' 'memorable Scene'.[10] And so Ralph in *1649*

> was not in the least concerned in the personal reactions of the actors on the scaffold ... It was a drama that rose above all personal considerations or feelings ... It cleared the ground. For what? That was the issue now, not the feelings or words of the man doomed to die under the axe. (13)

10 Andrew Marvell, 'An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return From Ireland', *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, revised Pierre Legouis with Elsie Duncan-Jones, 2 volumes, Oxford, 1971.

The opening scene then 'cleared the ground' for the new developments. And it is the new political struggle, the military Junto against the forces for emergent democracy and communism, the Levellers and Diggers, and the emerging force of Capital, with which the novel deals.[11]

Appropriately for a concern with democratic and egalitarian issues, the novel moves amongst representative, fictional characters, 'ordinary people', not famous historical personages. Lukács criticized the tendency of the twentieth-century historical novel to focus on the famous historical figure, to depend on a biographical model for representing historical process.

> With the classics and their conception the historical figures practically never *develop before our eyes*. The genesis and development of the 'world-Historical individual' take place *among the people*. The great figures appear, as Balzac showed in the case of Scott, only at such points where the objective necessity of the popular movements imperatively requires their appearance.[12]

And Lukács continued,

> the great task of the historical novel is to *invent* popular figures to represent the people and their predominant trends.
> It is natural that bourgeois historiography in general as a discipline of the ruling classes, should have consciously neglected, omitted or even slanderously distorted these factors of popular life. Here is where the historical novel, as a powerful artistic weapon in defence of human progress, has a major task to perform, to restore these real driving forces of human history as they were in reality, to recall them to life on behalf of the present.[13]

11 'However, before Lindsay dissolves the picture of English society in the year 1649 into individual actions, the first chapter, which describes the execution of Charles I, shows the full strength of the people.' Manfred Hecker, 'Besonderheiten des sozialistischen Realismus in Jack Lindsay's Romanen zur englischen Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 21 (1973): 148; cited and translated by H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s', in John Lucas, ed., *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, Hassocks, Sussex, 1978, p.28.

12 Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p.312.

13 *Ibid.*, p.317.

Lindsay's structure in *1649* is quite the opposite of the biographical. Instead of the career of the individual hero, he offers the portrait of a year with a range of characters; and within this range of characters, some are fictional, some historical.[14]

Immediately, the stress is on the range. It is an example of that 'passage from individualism (with its implicit "cult of the personality") to a new type of collective narration' of which Fredric Jameson writes in *Marxism and Form*.[15] Lindsay has attempted that 'transcendence of individualistic point of view in general by more genuinely collective forms, by new modes of narration which correspond formally to the realities of a postindividual world'.[16] Lindsay achieves this transcendence by multiplying the point of view, not by denying the individual life; the stress is on the conflicting multiplicity of individual points of view; Ralph, Randol, Margaret, and Isaac Lydcot, Francis Seymour, Lucy Brook, Will Scamler, Roger Cotton and Lionel Lydcot. These are the fictional figures listed as 'Main Characters of the Story' (xi), and it is from their point of view that different sections are told. And then point of view itself is intermixed with diary extracts (fictional) and historical statements and writings (documentary). While point of view itself is no longer privileged before explicit historical-political analysis. And fictional characters are augmented by historical figures, whose known statements are incorporated into their utterance.

But the historical are presented in relation to the consciousness of the fictional characters. Arthur Boon's journal introduces the occasional reference to Milton amongst others; Francis Seymour's visit to the London brothel where royalist conspirators hang out allows a brief glimpse of Kenelm Digby; and Ralph's presence viewing the suppression of Lockyer's mutiny allows a glimpse of Cromwell and Fairfax. But to

14 'Lindsay can claim to have "democratised" the genre. It was his avowed aim to make the reader aware of the revolutionary tradition of the British people. To carry out this plan, he developed an ingenious device: a number of historical personalities do make their appearance in his novels, but their actual role in the plot depends on how much in real history they helped to further historical progress. Thus the great historical figures obstructing social progress recede into the background before the leading men of the popular movements, while these in their turn diminish behind fictive heroes, taken from the anonymous mass of the people.' H. Gustav Klaus, in Lucas, *The 1930s*, p.27.

15 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, 1971, p.264.

16 *Ibid.*, p.358.

approach the historical figures through the fictional characters is not a reduced version of post-Jamesian point of view; rather it is like Milton's presenting the garden in *Paradise Lost* only after Satan had arrived in it; not Eden through Satan's eyes, but an Eden no longer pure of the contamination of evil, of confusion. The perception of historical character through fictional character is the necessary fictional intrusion into the hypothetically objective history: this is fiction, undeniably, the device is revealed; but only through the admission of a fictional note in the approach can the history be retrieved; what else is 'history' but mediated through some such verbal fiction? While the events in which the historical figures are put are not merely costuming. Ralph's glimpse of the generals introduces a relevant theme, both historical and contemporary; he considers their vulnerability to an assassin's bullet.

> What would happen if Cromwell were to die? Would his death irreparably damage the Junto, or would it give them the very pretext for crushing the Levellers that they wanted? It was this uncertainty that held Ralph's hand, as doubtless, he thought, it held Lockyer's. (225)

The perfunctory 'as doubtless, he thought, it held Lockyer's' is not the scrupulous, tortuous, establishment of inward point of view; it is a shorthand, explicit admission of the speculation, because the interest is in the speculation, the content, not in the concealed, dramatized point of view. The focus is on the historical-political analysis. The Junto's claim to be the force of law and order, and the danger of playing into their hands by adventuristic violence, is a theme that runs through their conflict with the Levellers. It is spelled out later in a passage of direct analysis, devoid of conventionalized trappings of point of view narrative.

> The nature of the Levellers' cause required that they should as long as possible abstain from violence; for the Junto, having seized power by excluding from Parliament all opposed members, were in the fortunate position of appearing as the champions of 'law and order'. It was to their advantage to provoke small groups of Levellers to resistance; they would then have the desired pretext of using force, while working on the neutral class sections by

> proclaiming that they were merely suppressing disturbers of the peace. (254)

Again, a twentieth-century relevance informs the historically accurate analysis.

The Levellers—Lilburne, Walwyn, Thompson, Overton, Chidley and others—are approached through Ralph Lydcot; Winstanley and the Diggers are approached through Roger Cotton; two figures drawn to these democratic initiatives. But in their waverings, in their uncertainties, Ralph and Roger allow the reader a freer access to the ideas and appeals of the historical radicals than a purely biographical approach to Lilburne or Winstanley could have provided. They are both examples of what Lukács calls in Scott's historical fiction the 'mediocre man'.

> He generally possesses a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a great cause.[17]

Lukács formulates the importance of such figures.

> Scott presents great crises of historical life in his novels. Accordingly, hostile social forces, bent on one another's destruction, are everywhere colliding. Since those who lead these warring forces are always passionate partisans of their respective sides, there is the danger that their struggle will become a merely external picture of mutual destruction incapable of arousing the human sympathies and ethusiasms of the reader. It is here that the compositional importance of the mediocre hero comes in. Scott always chooses as his principal figures such as may, through character and fortune, enter into human contact with both camps. The appropriate fortunes of such a mediocre hero, who sides passionately with neither of the warring camps

17 Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p.33.

> in the great crisis of his time can provide a link of this kind without forcing the composition.[18]

Ralph is a merchant's son whose humane impulses have directed him towards the Levellers. 'He felt the bowels of compassion move within him, but not for the dead king, rather for the masses who were now turning to life again, to the manifold tasks and miseries of their lot.' (17) The compassion is a strongly positive note; indeed, it is just such compassion that inspires Lindsay's social commitment. But at the same time it is also a mark of Ralph's alienation, his class separation from the common people. 'Ralph wanted to get some satisfying contact with the man at his side.' (3) There is the impulse to union, but that very impulse marks the separation; and the compassion indicates, too, the standpoint of the compassionate: it is a position of alienation from those others seen as the mass, the standpoint of an economically superior position looking at the unkown. Roger, the bookseller's apprentice, is also alienated from his milieu, but economically he is closer to the circumstances of the people who for Ralph are an unknown anonymous mass.

> Only the shop-bargainers could make profits. Roger felt his disgust of the world growing daily more precise and compulsive.... The dream which Roger once had of earthly contentment—a small bookshop of his own—became tainted with the smell of corruption which now for him infected the whole world of buying and selling. (69)

His disgust, his separation from the profit motive is clear enough. But after he has been gaoled, framed by his employer, he realizes that alongside that alienation from the cash values of the city was an equally positive sense of human communion with his fellows.[19]

> He thought his heart would burst as he stepped out from under the

18 *Ibid.*, pp.36–7.

19 'Jack Lindsay gives to "natural humanity" direct expression—and this is characteristic of his technique—by portraying the individual's need for unity with such humanity.' Alick West, *The Mountain in the Sunlight* (1958), Westport, Connecticut, 1980, p.191.

> dank shadow of the gate, into the busy street of freedom. He wanted nothing but to see the people passing, to be jostled, to hear the many voices ... to be part of the living stream. He didn't care that his last coin had gone in fees and palm-greasing. Even to starve in the open was no longer fearful. He discovered how much he had relied on a sense of fellowship with the great entangled mass of Londoners; he had taken it for granted, going what he thought was his lonely way of light; but even in his most embittered hour of solitude and darkness he had been upheld by these jostling noisy myriads; his security and his fear had been alike involved with the tumultuous life going on about him. For when that life had been taken away from him, only the horror of the void remained. He stumbled along the streets of London, rapturously enjoying this new awareness of communion. (184–5) (... in original)

We can see Ralph and Roger as variations of the same impulse, spreading across the wider class base; the shared syllable in their surnames—Lydcot, Cotton—the shared initial Rs of their christian names, present them as related figures; just as familial relationship and the initial R connect Ralph and his brother Randol, the non-compassionate, self-seeking, sexually predatory other Lydcot. Randol perceives the sufferings but remains unmoved; his visit to the Yorkshire woollen district allows the novel a further spread of social information and an image of the unfeeling profit imperative of the merchant class.

> Randol had always known vaguely how the trade was run; but now he saw the pattern in action and found how much more complicated it was than he had supposed ... but he had no interest in the question of developing production methods. Think of the overhead expenses in a big concern, even if the employer did manage to snatch an old monastery or abbey, or even a church. No, all that interested Randol was what interested his father. To buy up the products of labour as cheaply as possible and sell them as expensively as possible.
>
> He went into only one of the cottages where wool was being prepared; he watched the wool being sprinkled in layers with oil, tossed about and beaten with sticks; then carded into a fluffy mass

between two boards with wire teethed combs till the long fibres could be pulled up by hand. The wool had to be kept warm; and the charcoal stove left the room heavy with poisonous fumes. The cottagers were pale, cadaverous, and continually drinking water.

Randol went outside half stunned with the fumes and almost vomited. After that he lost interest in the ways wool was treated. (408–9)

Randol's 'he saw the pattern in action and found how much more complicated it was than he supposed' is a characteristic Lindsayan note: the pattern, and the stress against oversimplification is not something we are told of 1930s marxism; yet it is basic to Lindsay's approach. *1649* is a long book—562 pages—so that the complexity can be established and the societal processes are not presented in an oversimplified way; but as always with Lindsay, there is the assertion that amidst the complexity there is a pattern; and a pattern in action, dynamic, not static. And the impulse of the characters as of the novelist himself is to reveal and understand this pattern. The novelistic method is displayed, not concealed. Against the habitual mystification of popular historical romance, Lindsay lays bare the fictional procedures: both the search for pattern and the difficulty of discovering it, the problems of the confusing model.

Quietly holding her in his arms, Ralph dreamed on into the dawn. He made no decisions: but everything seemed arranged. There was harmony everywhere; his uncle and Mr Cocks and his father and Lilburne and Overton, Cromwell even and Sir Charles Trefusis, they all seemed to be playing parts in a masque and antimasque. Playing parts worthy or unworthy, but somehow merged in a unity greater than themselves, which was hurrying them on unrealized paths. Like the characters in the play, conceived as figments of a single theme by the playwright despite the conflicting ways they seemed to pull. Yes, one man went down and another came through, and yet the final reality was the compulsive theme.

This explanation seemed luminously satisfying as he drowsed away, happy in assuming the role of Joan Carew's protector; but when he came fully awake and the trees creaked in the first dawn rays, it seemed quite wrong. For where was the unifying

> playwright? Each man, in the living world, was playwright as well as actor... . In short, the metaphor wouldn't hold water, it was sieved. Yet he felt happy still, no longer bothered by all the contradictions. (353–4) (.... in original)

The complexity, the pattern, the impulse to understand: these result in a recurrent note of analysis through the novel. Scenes are set, London is evoked in order that the explanation may be drawn:

> They went on past the three cranes, boats pulled up on the mud, men arguing on the wharf, a barge being unloaded of wool-bales, a crane from a third storey taking up sacks of corn; then on to Queens Hithe and Paul's Wharf. Everywhere the same hurry of trade, merchandise being taken in and out. Somebody was making money. (159)

And the explanation is characteristically social explanation, historical explanation. Ralph and his cousin Lucy are rowed up the Thames and pass

> Essex House, Arundel and Somerset and Savoy, Worcester plain and heavy, Salisbury turreted, Durham a squat battlemented mass, York and Suffolk, all with towers and arrow-windows and fortifications, emblems of the days when men openly organized against one another. That rule was over now; but another, as ruthless through hiddenly pervasive, had come in its place. But, he thought, whatever we've done, we've broken down the moats around the lives of these great men and their towering arrogance. The struggle was closer, more interlocked, prefiguring a richer coherence, in the busy docks and warehouses along the banks of commerce. For the first time he felt interested in the ways of commerce, his father's ways; wanting to grapple with them, to understand them from within.
>
> He had forgotten Lucy; her hand tightened on his as they neared Whitehall Stairs....(159–160)

At this point in the novel Ralph is in love with Lucy but the love interest is forgotten in the excitement of historical analysis. It is a wry note,

appropriate for this novel in which likewise the analysis takes dominance over the episodes of romance. And it is not a naive or crude analytic explicitness. Lindsay is self-aware of his procedure, as this wry note indicates; and aware, too, of the difficulties of analytic explanation; and above all of the difficulty of relating the theoretical comprehension to the living experience.

> Lucy turned her head away; she was weeping. He patted her on the back, but she shook his hand off, and he drifted again into his political musings; the latest news from Hants and Bucks; Overton saying, 'Only that which is rational (which injustice and tyranny cannot be) may at any time be legal'. Lilburne saying 'Reason is demonstrable by its innate glory, life and efficacy; and man being a reasonable creature is judge for himself'. Sitting beside Lucy, in whom he could find nothing reasonable whatsoever, he tried to unravel these sayings which were so perfectly simple while one acclaimed them, but which became so dark when one tried to apply them. (163–4)

We have come to shy away from explicit ideas in fiction. The Jamesian imperative of Dramatize! resulted in the exclusion of content, a flight from analysis, a fear of the explicit. The taboo on the analytic idea resulted in a trivialization of English language fiction in the mid-twentieth century. For the analytic is a component of the totality of experience. To exclude it, to allow only intimation, allusion, implication, is as distortive as to depend on it wholly. The stress on the 'novel as dramatic poem,' while valuably emphasizing the non-explicit, the formal, the metaphoric, resulted in an extreme in which nothing was to be said, the novel as a species of style, of manners, devitalized, unimportant, no longer taken seriously by readers, relegated to diversion, or the specialization of aesthetics. William Morris, Jack London, D. H. Lawrence all stressed the analytic alongside the other fictional components; they offered the explicit analysis of historical development, of social process in *News from Nowhere* (1890), *The Iron Heel* (1907) and *Kangaroo* (1923) but at the cost of being dismissed as didactic, of writing undigested ideas, of not writing 'true' fiction. And the prevalent fear of such critical rejection has resulted in a spreading emptiness in the English language novel. So that to turn

to Lindsay is to be struck by how recurrent, how much part of his novel's texture, is the analysis of social process: and how interesting, compelling and satisfying such analysis is. The analytical becomes a formal characteristic; content is not hidden beneath or amidst the purely formal, but displayed directly, unclothed, bare. The conflict of form and content in mid-century novelistic theory is thus directly cut through: content is form, form is content.

It is in the stress on pattern that we can find the novel's formal organization rather than in character. For though there is an established range of representative characters, as the traditional historical novel expects, the interest does not lie in them but in the structure of thought, in the totality of analysis and patterns. For the era of the confident presentation of the fully rounded character, the triumph of bourgeois individualism, has passed. Lindsay is writing at that historical point which Fredric Jameson describes in *Marxism and Form*, when

> the novel, as a meaningful identification between the individual and social dimensions, begins to come apart at the seams as a form. Now that individual experience has ceased to coincide with social reality, the novel is menaced by twin contingencies. If it holds to the purely existential, to the truth of subjectivity, it risks turning into ungeneralizable psychological observation, with all the validity of mere case history. If, on the other hand, it attempts to master the objective structure of the social realm, it tends to be governed more and more by categories of abstract knowledge rather than concrete experience, and consequently to sink to the level of thesis and illustration, hypothesis and example.[20]

What Lindsay attempts is to remain in balance between these two extreme positions, to satisfy both impulses, to hold them together in tension.

The elements of psychological case history are there in the study of Roger's love and jealousy for Nell, in the dependencies and quarrels, the union and the tearing each other apart.

20 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p.28.

> She was like himself, lost, damned, unable to stand on her own feet, yet resenting her dependence with a fury that stupefied her from making any advance to reliance on self. She could not bear the least flicker of fear in him because she was herself so afraid.
>
> She wept, and then retreated into a state of coma. He would have thought her unconscious if it had not been for her dully staring eyes. She lay unmoving, speechless, no matter how he pleaded or touched her. And yet he talked on, he tried to caress her with clumsy and frantic movements, although he knew quite well that every word or touch made things worse, showed more irrevocably his fear. And it was the fear that cut them apart; and all their blind crying of love, all their efforts to build an impregnably static relationship either on pity or on desire, were rendered hopeless by the enduring fear that seared their lives. It wasn't fear of any one thing; not even fear of starvation, though that fear was perhaps the deepest element to which he could give a name. In the lightning-spurts of vision that came to him in the midst of anguish, he was able to feel the entirety of his fear, which was also her fear. There were two roots, one going back through the whole history of his maltreated body, the other involving the whole vast mass of discord in which they were embedded. And it was because of this duality that they could find no balance, that they failed to set up that static relationship which they hoped would save them from hurt and insult. For no sooner did they seem to be getting one side clear than the other burst into stormy anger and wrecked the effort. (448–9)

It would be possible to collapse this into the autobiographical, to see here the fictional projection of Lindsay's own life situation at this point that he describes in *Fanfrolico and After*. But for *1649* the point is the way this movingly rendered account of irreconcilability and conflict is used, both to provide the expected psychological depth to character of the mid twentieth-century novel, and at the same time to present in this individual case the larger social conflicts that are the novel's larger theme: the violence and irreconcilabilities of the revolutionary period, the psychic convulsions, the social fears; and in Roger's sexual fears, his possessiveness, his jealousies, his haunting obsessions that Nell is selling herself into prostitution as she did in the gaol, are the focussed

fears and taboos of the cash society. Roger and Nell are lone, disconnected individuals; they have no family relationships, no ties with place or community; they are the fodder for the emerging industrial society, the landless. And in structural contrast is the bourgeois family of the Lydcots—Ralph, Randol, their sister Margaret, the father Isaac, uncle Lionel: with the Lydcots we have the embryonic bourgeois family saga, the ingredients for the hagiographic chronicle of merchant accumulation.

Roger's conflicts provide access to the conflicts and sufferings of the historical figures, who cannot be presented with comparable inwardness. How can the novelist presume to know the inward agonies of the historical figure—unless those conflicts are recorded in some sort of documentary form, diary, letter, personal memoir? To presume to invent psychological complexity is not only to provoke doubt in the reader, to lose credibility; but also to create a sense of impropriety, improper intrusiveness. Yet without this living complexity how can the historical figure live? Lindsay's solution is to present Lilburne and Winstanley in their public roles, while reserving for the fictional figures the private intimacies which we have come to expect, indeed demand, of the novel by the 1930s. Lilburne is presented externally, as public figure: Roger is presented inwardly, but with no public role; but the juxtaposition, the patterning, allows a seepage across, so that when the novel is finished the total impression is of a rich complexity of private and public.

> Roger was staring at the intrepid man who was being tried for his life by judges determined to hem him in and trip him up. His own agonies of dream-persecution seemed infinitely futile and shameful when compared with the actuality of struggle going on under his eyes. (478–9)

The lines of Roger's private torment and Lilburne's public torment are brought together in the treatment of Lilburne's trial. Roger reflects,

> He had known the heavy hand of man's cruelty and greed; but he had never before seen the whole struggle, the righteous man arrayed against the great ones of the world, in so stark and noble a form. This struggle, in its simple and heroic pattern, was entirely

> outside him, absolutely real, implicating everything of significance in the age's turmoil; and for that reason it came home to him with tremendous force, clarifying his personal conflicts. (490)

But Lilburne's 'heroic' role is carefully placed; placed not only in his limitations—his need to fight everything through court legalities—but placed in a wider context of other roles. If he is in part a sort of socialist hero, the novel at the same time markedly rejects any focus on a single 'hero'; for it is a socialist novel that stresses the collective, the co-operative, the social. The memory we take away from it is of the multiple components of society, not any individualist cult. The focus is on the collective aspirations of the Leveller programme and the Digger practice; that is what we take away more than any image of the individual figures. And detailed and deeply felt as Roger's psychological torments are, they drop back into being a part of the large pattern of the novel's totality.

The same thing happens with incidents as with characters. The incidents become part of the patterning, motions in the overall masque. Again, this is appropriate for the novel's meaning of co-operation, its complex social interweaving. But it is also a consequence of, and a solution to, problems raised by the situation of the novel in the mid-twentieth century. In his study of Wyndham Lewis, Fredric Jameson turns to the problem (and for the novelist it is there as problem) of

> the exhaustion of form ... the way in which the older realistic paradigms ceaselessly consume their own primary material and render it obsolete. The dialectic of innovation in the art of capitalism is best initially grasped, not in terms of formal invention, as the apologists of modernism have generally described it, but in terms of the exhaustion of the content of older forms, which, given paradigmatic expression in the great realistic novels, is thereby at once institutionalized, reappropriated and alienated.... A modernism such as that of Lewis must therefore adopt a kind of second-degree or reflexive, reactive strategy, in which the blurred outlines of the older narrative paradigm or proairetic unity remain in place, but are violently restructured. The modernist renewal must be effectuated within the confines of dead storytelling conventions which remain massively in place, in a world already overinfected with culture and dead forms and

> with a stifling weight of dead ideas. In this situation the novelist is less a creative than a performing artist. His primary text, his 'book' or script, is given him from the onset ... while his 'composition' of these scenes proves in reality to be an interpretation of them in much the same way that an actor's voice restores vitality to a faded text.[21]

With the historical novel, the expected, the conventionalized is inevitably there: especially for the novelist who is aiming to approach a central novel reading public rather than the specialized world of literary experiment. So Lindsay preserves the expected events of historical fiction without betraying his own sense of artistic integrity. We have the expected components of historical romance from the beginning with the costumed set piece of Charle's execution. But the execution is there for reinterpretation; for an end, not a beginning; for its irrelevance, as a relic of a superseded political career.

And so we have those high romantic episodes; Ralph's imprisonment and escape from imprisonment; his gothic evening in the Cornish country house which results in his killing the man who had arranged his imprisonment; his coming across the overturned coach that has been held up—though not by highwaymen but clubmen (a politicized variant)—and his discovery of his future wife there. Likewise there are the sexual episodes: Randol's philandering, Will's woodland lovemaking to Aleanora, the squire's daughter, and her father's discovery of them; old Lydcot seducing his new servant girl.

There are very much the givens of historical romance. And Lindsay takes them and turns them from narrative to pattern, from plot to image. The novel does not revolve on them; they are markedly not functional. The novel is not organized by plot or narrative but is arranged as a series of episodes, kaleidoscopic moments, progressing through the months of the year: time, history, carries the action along. So these episodes that if used functionally would seem clichéd, overdone, unpersuasive, nonetheless survive as gesture; aesthetic themes, necessities of the genre. They are gestures that are unfulfilled, as to fulfil them would be unnecessary, laborious; there is no follow up to

21 Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist*, Berkeley, 1979, pp.64–5.

Ralph's stabbing Pellew, there is no follow up to the assassination attempt by Roger and Pomfret. Character situations are established but there is none of that careful tying up of ends that would undermine the acceptability of the episodes. So we have the pleasure of the episode, the anecdote, the narrative in brief; without the destruction of that pleasure by an over-relation of the episodes. Their function becomes illustrative, tonal. And in this they are in accord with that other tonal effect, the range of voices, of registers. We move from third person narrative to first person—Roger describes himself though his journal, or is described externally; the idioms change, the points of view change. Lindsay describes his approach as

> attempting a multiple series of levels and angles and interspersing passages from contemporary writings. (One reason for this latter detail was to provide a touchstone which would show if the rest of the book had the tone and colour of the period. My method here as always was to avoid anachronisms, to be factually correct as possible in all things large and small, but not to try for a pastiche of the period's style. Nothing must jar as out of period, but otherwise one should write in a modern style. The effect should be simultaneously: How like ourselves, how unlike.)[22]

The interspersed seventeenth-century documentary passages add to and emphasize this range of voices. The modernist device of the collage, the scrap of newspaper on the painted surface, is employed; but here not randomly; the words on the collage scrap are meaningful. The collage effect is functional; it serves both to denote the presence of the documentary, the recognition of the 'real' in the fabricated, and to carry historical content. It is the disruption of hermetic, 'pure' art. And Lindsay's vocabulary in his comment on *1649* is a painterly one—'a multiple series of levels and angles,' 'tone and colour'. It suggests the analogy of modernist painting, the clashing lines, the collocations of angle and colour. It is these tonal clashes and contrasts, these juxtapositions of voice and idiom, of analysis and gesture, that are the organizing principle of the novel, rather than any traditional character portrayal or plot evolution.[23] Without surrendering the socialist

22 Lindsay, *Fanfrolico*, pp.270–1.

commitment to a 'realism' of psychological portrayal and authentic social evidence, Lindsay has nonetheless managed to rearrange these necessary ingredients in such a way that the aesthetic effect is one that breaks free from the limitations of a conventionalized realism. And the modernist disruption of harmonious plot and unified action in favour of tonal juxtapositions allows Lindsay the possibility of directly introducing the analytical. No longer does it need to be disguised in point of view, in metaphor, in symbol. Now it can take its proper role, its own tone. And so the political conflicts of *1649* are foregrounded. We have the clear, concise epitomes of the Leveller position and their dilemmas.

> United action of the rank-and-file in the Army and the Levellers outside the Army had compelled the grandees to stop their intrigues and bring Charles to the scaffold; for the moment, even Cromwell and Ireton, the 'Machiavellians' in Lilburne's phrase, had come right into line with the rank-and-file clamour. The first step towards the Freedom of England had been taken. Could the united movement continue to press irresistibly forward, a second time compelling the reluctant grandees into line? What the Levellers wanted was the dissolution of the Rump Parliament, an appeal to England to achieve self-government, yearly or at least biennial parliaments, universal suffrage. And the grandees were determined to block the extension of the suffrage. So many questions hinged on this matter of building a complete democracy. If Parliament was made a real mouthpiece of the popular will, privilege would be swept away everywhere ... in the town councils, in the city companies. All monopoly forms would be broken; and all the committee-men and time-servers, who had battened on the suffering nation during the Civil War, would be forced to make an account of their actions, to disgorge their ill-gotten gains. (67) (... in original)

But in the course of *1649* the Levellers are destroyed; the leaders are

23 The criticisms made by Alick West about 'loose' style (*Mountain in the Sunlight*, p.193) and by David Smith that 'Lindsay overwrites frequently' (*Socialist Propaganda*, p.108) need to be resituated in this context of contrasting, and often pastiche, voices.

gaoled, the army Levellers are provoked to mutiny and are broken. 'We had to take the risk—rather, accept the certainty—that by gaining justice over the Man of Blood we put ourselves under an Army tyranny ... the monster we have unavoidably created,' says Walwyn. (122)

The Leveller positions are presented sympathetically, but Ralph's partial doubts are there to place them. 'Ralph felt that there was some necessary co-ordination lacking in the Leveller programme and methods ... he could not but feel that Lilburne did not in himself grasp the whole situation'. (121) In the same way Roger, though similarly full of admiration for Winstanley, grows doubtful about the validity of the Digger analysis.

> Yet, for the first time, he grew disappointed in Winstanley, who kept on having hopes of converting Fairfax and other leading members of the Government party. Roger found that he had lost all hope in the ideas Winstanley had for building up the community, yet he still clung with unfaltering devotion to Winstanley's aims themselves. If those aims were disproved, then life would be utterly vile. (328)

Winstanley's way is that of cooperative settlement, community, non-violence. He declares,

> The way to cast out kingly power is not to cast it out by the sword; for that does but set him in more power and removes him from a weaker to a stronger hand. The only way to cast him out is for the people to leave him to himself, to forsake fighting and all oppression, and to live in love towards another. The power of love is the true saviour. (209)

The Leveller and Digger positions are established clearly and sympathetically. But at the same time Lindsay stresses the complexity of the total pattern. There are other forces at work. The novel's opening with the execution of Charles offered multiple possibilities for development. But the one development that does not ensue is a continuation of the royalist-parliamentarian conflict. The old claims of divine right, absolute monarchy are now abandoned. There are references to the selling up of royalist estates, there is the suggestion

that Francis Steyling is involved in royalist conspiracies; but the old, romantic, cavalier versus roundhead image of the civil war is not indulged in here. The civil war is over, new forces are in conflict now. The significance of opening with the execution is that the royalist position is not developed; it is a significant absence, a deliberately curtailed, abortive note, an irrelevance.

In a similar sense the conflict between the Junto and the Levellers and Diggers is a diversionary conflict. Both Ralph and Roger have their humane aspirations, their commitments to fellowship, to love. But at the same time as the army Junto and the radicals are in conflict, the forces of finance are gaining ground for themselves. The emergent power is the power of capital.[24] And so when Randol heads for Yorkshire, we are given an explanation of the emerging financial structures. Randol is apprenticed to the iron trade, but he

> had no intention of setting up as an ironmonger; the merchants of London belonged to almost any of the Companies and laid out their money in manufacture or trade without any particular concern for the craft to which they nominally belonged. The Companies had thus become a network of interlocked finance, a façade behind which the men with capital built up their power. The façade looked like a strict craft organization, with rules to protect the status of everyone associated with the craft, journeymen, apprentice, or small master; but in fact, the Companies had fallen increasingly into the hands of the small London group of mercantile capitalists. This development had not happened without continual opposition from everyone else involved; and there were strong rivalries between the London financiers and the merchant groups of the other cities where trade had prospered at industry's expense, such as York and Hull. (369)

The centralizing tendency of the financiers requires a breaking down of all alternative cooperative attempts; the breaking down of cooperation at every level is one of the central themes of *1649*: the Levellers in the

24 'The bourgeois flowering has to come before the proletarian revolution: Lindsay makes the point without protruding too obviously the sharp elbow of ideology.' David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda*, p.108.

army, the Diggers' attempted communal settlements, the regional wool-trade:

> Randol called on all the chief merchants, was welcomed as the son of a rich London dealer, and adroitly dangled the bait. By conceding them small advantages in the London market he managed to break their interest in the incorporation scheme; and he took up the factor's suggestion of frightening them by emphasizing the disaffected state of the countryside, where several small revolts appeared during the last couple of months. London was the safe spot, the one certain money-market. Why not follow the centralizing tendency of the age? One clinching point was the fact that for the last three years the deputy of the Eastland Company had been governor of the Merchant Adventurers in York. Was it not obvious how all finance was becoming linked up? Only a fool would want to exclude himself from the advantages of the new tendency. (406)

Out of the complexity the pattern emerges. Lindsay shows the emergence of the developing economic forces, the free market advocated by Lionel Lydcot. Ralph is torn between the Levellers and his uncle Lionel. He tries to understand his uncle's position, in which

> he felt a core of resistance which somehow stood outside the whole battle of Levellers and Junto. No, it didn't stand outside; it was implicated at every point and yet it stood on a hidden base that the words under which the battle was fought did not touch. L. L. wanted the Junto to win; but the reasons why he wanted it weren't clear to Ralph. There was personal greed involved, but something as well. (287)

'A necessity beyond resistance' is how Lionel phrases it to Ralph. (231) Looking at the passers-by Lionel looks forward to a capitalist's dream:

> 'There are the buyers. Think of the infinite demand for goods if all those people had money to buy.'
>
> Mr Durfey snorted. 'I never heard such incredible nonsense.

> You carry paradox too far. How are the people ever to get the money?'
>
> 'By the expansion of foreign trade caused by the free market', said Mr Lydcot confidently. (375)

The confusion, the murky pattern. At the end of the novel, at Lilburne's trial,

> As he listened to the case proceeding, Ralph saw what the basic issues were. Not the matters which were, in fact, wrangled over, but the opposition of Lilburne as the people's spokesman to the judges as the upholders of hierarchy. Lilburne had to use the legalist weapons which could alone have any effect in the court; but underneath his plea was everywhere based on the demand for simple equalitarian treatment. (478)

By this point Ralph has recommitted himself to his class position; after his radical flirtation, he becomes the good son of the merchant. At his wife's pressure he has burned his Leveller books—an episode unemphasized, emblematic enough in itself, as relevant for the twentieth century as for the seventeenth. (515) 'A man who won't buy and sell, and who can't find consolation in the Gospels, has a hard time ahead of him my friend,' says Overton. (553) But the stress is on complexity still, not loss. Walwyn delivers the positive message from the novel's final discussion:

> 'Then I can see no other way to your true commonwealth ... than by the way of Cromwell, which aims at raising the national wealth without concern for the fact that many will be trampled to death and degradation in the process, and that even those who stand aloft will bear on their brows the mark of Cain, earning uneasy sleep. Of these latter I am one', he said with a short laugh. 'A successful merchant.... And it follows that when a people are straitened in the accommodations of life, their spirits will be dejected and servile; so that, conducing to the end of freedom, will be an improving of our native commodities—our manufactures, our fisheries, our fens, forests and commons, our trade at sea, and so on, which could give at least a part of our nation a comfortable subsistence. So that, Mr

> Winstanley, if we cannot go your straight way, maybe General Cromwell is going the same way, albeit round many corners and through a maze.' (557–8)

So that though the Levellers and the Diggers are defeated, their ambitions, their principles remain and are reasserted, for fulfilment at a later stage of development. Their message is given an important reiteration. As Andy Croft puts it, '*1649* brought the excluded radicals of English history in from its margins'.[25] Lilburne's egalitarian struggle against hierachy will continue to be basic, whatever tortured forms it has to be waged in. The powerful speech the Leveller propagandist Chidley addresses to Ralph earlier in the novel resonates as one of the enduring positive notes of the book:

> the voice of the people, lad. Learn to know it and trust it. Take the world as it goes; it's dark and bloody with guilt; and it goes on, it stamps on without a turn of the head; you think it's foul to everlasting. And then you hear that weak and rambling voice that's singing where a few poor men meet. And you hear something different. You hear this protest against money-mongers ... against them that make their dice of poor men's bones.... But that unimportant voice is singing where poor men meet. And some day it will speak out louder and louder. That's what I work for. That's all I care for. I can't see the end.... And I know it will take a long time.... (135)

Like all of Lindsay's work, *1649* stresses the positive message that can be drawn. It is not a cry of despair, not a nihilistic record of a year of defeat, as it could easily have been presented. There is no avoiding the suffering, the wretchedness, the exploitation; gaol is the setting for a large part of the book—Roger, Nell, Ralph, Lilburne are

25 Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days; British Fiction in the 1930s*, London, 1990, p.208. Alick West complained 'one feels nothing of the real achievement of the bourgeois revolution—that it was a liberation from the feudal order.' (*Mountain in the Sunlight*, p.195) Lindsay's concern, however, was not to write an academic historical novel but to see in the historical some positive political significance for the present. It was the fate of the cooperative and communist impulses of the revolution that concerned him.

all incarcerated at different times; but they are all released; this is the cycle of death and rebirth, the seasonal cycle of renewal basic to Lindsay's vision. Although the suffering and the defeats are recorded his search is for the hopes of unity, for positive action, for ways through, for lines to be reconnected back to the heritage of cooperative action that the Levellers and Diggers show. It is not a book about the evil of the oppressors; the evil is there, it is never whitewashed, but it is not the theme; it is a book about people looking for ways ahead, ways to achieve cooperative freedom. It is a society of spies, provocateurs, military repression; but we don't come away with a feeling of negativity and defeat; rather, a feeling of having explored the possible avenues, the possible explanations, in order to understand. Overton concludes the final discussion: 'There was much truth spoken tonight, I think; but the truth lies in active achievement, wherein all spoken and written truths are tested. We'll fight on, lad, openly or out of sight. That's all that matters.' (558)